Chapter 79: The Pit

TO THINK SUCH EXTRAVAGANCE CAN BE FOUND IN A FORTRESS.
AN EXOTIC, IMPORTED CARPET MADE FROM LUXURIOUS FUR.
TEA SMELLING OF FLOWERS AND HONEY.
HOW COMES YOUR APOTHECARY WORK?

ONCE A DAY...
...MY GUARDS PULL ME OUT OF MY ROOM AND BRING ME HERE.
I WILL REQUIRE A BIT MORE TIME.
VERY WELL.
ANOTHER THING...
IT'S ALSO PECULIAR TO SEE SUIREI AND LOULAN HERE.
OR A RESULT OF MUSK MIXED INTO THE INCENSE?
IS THE SPECTACLE IN THE BACK A RESULT OF ALCOHOL?

HERE, THEY LOOK LIKE MISTRESS AND SERVANT.
APOTHE-CARY!
DID YOU JUST GO SEE LADY SHENMEI ?!

I DID INDEED. WHAT MAY I DO FOR YOU?
HEH HEH
GAH!
STOP BEING WEIRD!
ANNOYING LITTLE PUNK.
THE GUARDS ARE THE ONLY THING KEEPING ME FROM POPPING YOU ONE RIGHT NOW.
...THERE ARE.
UM!
ARE THERE OTHER WOMEN THERE WITH HER?
IF YOU HAVE NO NEED OF ME, I'LL JUST BE ON MY WAY.
ONE OF THEM IS MY MOTHER.
DOES SHE LOOK ALL RIGHT?

ONE OF THOSE WOMEN?
THAT CERTAINLY ISN'T A SCENE I'D DESCRIBE TO A CHILD.
I COULDN'T TELL YOU. I WOULDN'T KNOW HER FACE.
OH. OKAY.
SO THAT'S HOW IT IS.
GUESS THAT MAKES SENSE.
MOTHER'S PROBABLY REAL BUSY.
MAYBE I SHOULD'VE JUST WAITED FOR HER BACK IN THE VILLAGE.

HIS MOTHER KNEW WHAT SHE'D BE GETTING INTO...
...AND MADE THE DELIBERATE DECISION TO LEAVE HIM AT THE VILLAGE.
IF HIS MOTHER IS THERE...
...WAITING FOR HER IN THE HOT SPRING VILLAGE WOULD HAVE BEEN PRUDENT.
OR MAYBE ...
AH! HEY!
IF THAT IS ALL...
?
...
GAWP
GAWP

...
A FEW DAYS LATER ...
THIS IS AN UNFORTUNATE POSITION TO BE IN, BUT I DON'T HATE IT.
BASED ON THE DOCU-MENTS LEFT BEHIND ...
...THE PRIOR APOTHE-CARY...
...WAS RESEARCH-ING THE CREATION OF ELIXIRS OF REVIVAL AND ETERNAL YOUTH.
THE ASSORTMENT OF MEDICINES IS OLD, BUT WELL-STOCKED ENOUGH.

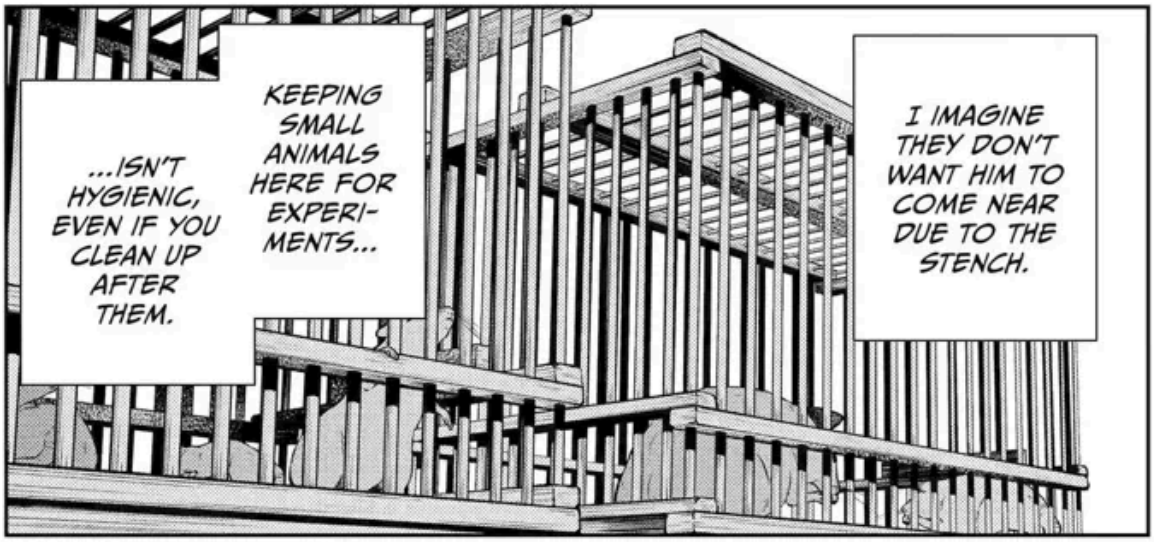
EVIDENTLY, THE APOTHECARY KNEW WHAT HE WAS DOING.
THE RESULT OF THAT RESEARCH IS SUIREI'S MIRACULOUS REVIVAL.

NATURALLY, PROPER EXERCISE AND A BALANCED DIET...
...CONTRIBUTE TO SLOWING THE AGING PROCESS.
BUT THERE IS NO WAY TO HALT IT ENTIRELY.

BUT AS FAR AS ETERNAL YOUTH...
...HIS WORK ONLY WENT AS FAR AS BEAUTY PRODUCTS AND PURIFYING THE BODY.

...IS AN ELIXIR THAT WILL UNDO THE EFFECTS OF TEN YEARS IN A SINGLE GULP.
AND YET WHAT SHENMEI SEEKS...

A MIRACLE DRUG. THERE'S NO SUCH THING.
THE SEARCH FOR ETERNAL YOUTH MUST BE HARD ON THE TEST SUBJECTS.
CHRR
CHRR
BUT I CAN'T REMAIN IDLE SO LONG AS I'M HERE.
WAH
HA
HA
THMP
THMP
THMP
THMP
AND HIS ATTENDANT HAS TO COME FETCH HIM EVERY TIME.
AW!
YOUNG MASTER, YOU MUSTN'T!
HE'S BEEN COMING BY QUITE OFTEN THESE DAYS.
KYOU-U AND HIS RETINUE AGAIN.


...ISN'T HYGIENIC, EVEN IF YOU CLEAN UP AFTER THEM.
KEEPING SMALL ANIMALS HERE FOR EXPERI-MENTS...
I IMAGINE THEY DON'T WANT HIM TO COME NEAR DUE TO THE STENCH.

THE STENCH OF MANURE... OR ROTTEN EGGS WAFTS UP FROM BELOW.
NOT TO MENTION THE STAIRS FURTHER DOWN THE HALL.

RSTL
LET'S JUST HOPE NOTHING EXPLODES.
THEY COULD BE DOING RESEARCH ON FEIFA THIS VERY MOMENT.
THE SAME SCENT FROM WHEN THOSE FEIFA WERE USED.

WHAT?
A SCRAP OF PAPER?
TMBL
HM?
"RUN. I'LL DISTRACT THE GUARD."
RSTL
SO HE KNOWS I'M BEING HELD HERE AGAINST MY WILL?
HMM.
A COIL OF WIRE?
FROM KYOU-U?

AH!
HEY!
HEY, YOU!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?!
THMP
THMP
THMP
A WIRE THIS THIN HAS NO HOPE OF OPENING THIS DOOR.
AND HE'S BEEN CAUGHT ALREADY.
L-LET GO!
LEMME GO!

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS?

I DID NOTHING OF THE SORT.
DID YOU PUT HIM UP TO THIS?
WHAT? NO!
WERE YOU TRYING TO SPRING HER?

WHAT, YOU'RE SAYING I WAS WRONG ?!
SURE AM.
CHECKIN' IN TO SEE IF THE GUARD WAS SLACKING OFF.
I WAS JUST PLAYING! LIKE I ALWAYS DO!
OKAY!
...JUST, DON'T DO ANYTHING LIKE THIS AGAIN.
HAAH...
CLACK
CLACK
CLACK
I'LL JUST FEIGN IGNORANCE AND LET THINGS WORK THEMSELVES OUT...
I HAVE THE DISTINCT IMPRESSION SUIREI SEES RIGHT THROUGH HIM.

OH? WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?
SHEEEN

IS THAT HIS MOTHER?
GLARE
OH?
NOTHING OF GREAT IMPOR-TANCE.
MAKING MISCHIEF, WERE YOU?
WE BROUGHT THE APOTHECARY OUT TO CHECK WITH HER, JUST IN CASE.
KYOU-U WAS SIMPLY PLAYING NEAR HER ROOM AND GOT IN THE GUARD'S WAY.
CLACK
NAUGHTY LITTLE BOYS NEED TO BE PUNISHED.
CLACK
WE CAN'T HAVE THAT, NOW CAN WE?
CLACK

MAYBE A SPANKING IS IN ORDER.
LADY SHENMEI.
KYOU-U IS STILL JUST A BOY.
IT WAS REALLY NO MATTER.

...I SEE.
MEANING...

NO, MY LADY!
...THE GUARD RAISED A FUSS OVER NOTHING?

PERHAPS TIME IN THE WATER PRISON WILL STRAIGHTEN YOU OUT.
OH?
IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU'VE MADE QUITE THE ERROR.

LEAVING HIM SUBMERGED IN WATER, IN THIS CHILL?
WATER PRISON?
BUT ...!

NO. SHE DOESN'T CARE ABOUT BEING REA-SONABLE.
THAT'S OUTRA-GEOUS.
SHE JUST LOVES SEEING OTHERS SUFFER.
TOR-MENTING OTHERS...
...IS HOW SHE GETS HER THRILLS.

...SHE MAKES ME SICK.
HONESTLY...
WRETCHED OLD HAG.

WHAP

I KNOW THAT.
I KNOW THAT, BUT...
THAT WAS STUPID.

I HAD THE BOY CREATE A DISTRACTION SO I COULD SLIP AWAY.
I PLANNED THE ENTIRE THING.
BUT...
YOU LOOK LIKE A DEMON FROM HERE.
NOW THAT'S AN UGLY EXPRESSION.

...I HAVE PLENTY OF EXPERIENCE WITH WRETCHED OLD HAGS.
WHAP
HAAH
HAAH

ANOTHER WORTHLESS APOTHECARY.
YOU'LL NEED TO BE TAUGHT A LESSON.
BUT... I SUPPOSE I WAS ASKING FOR IT.
TAKE HER TO THE WATER PRISON.
THIS IS BAD.
LADY SHENMEI.
...AND IGNORED KYOU-U AND THE GUARD.
REALLY, I SHOULD'VE JUST KEPT MY MOUTH SHUT...

CAN WE AFFORD TO LOSE ANOTHER APOTHECARY?
YOU FOOL!

WHAP
GLARE...
FWP
BUT—
I DON'T REMEMBER ASKING FOR YOUR OPINION.
...MY DEEPEST APOLOGIES.

DRIP
DRIP
DRIP
GRAB

LICK
...A SINGLE DROP OF IMPURE BLOOD IS ENOUGH TO RUIN IT.
NO MATTER HOW NOBLE YOUR LINEAGE IS...

PAT
FWM
I CAN'T USE THIS ANYMORE.

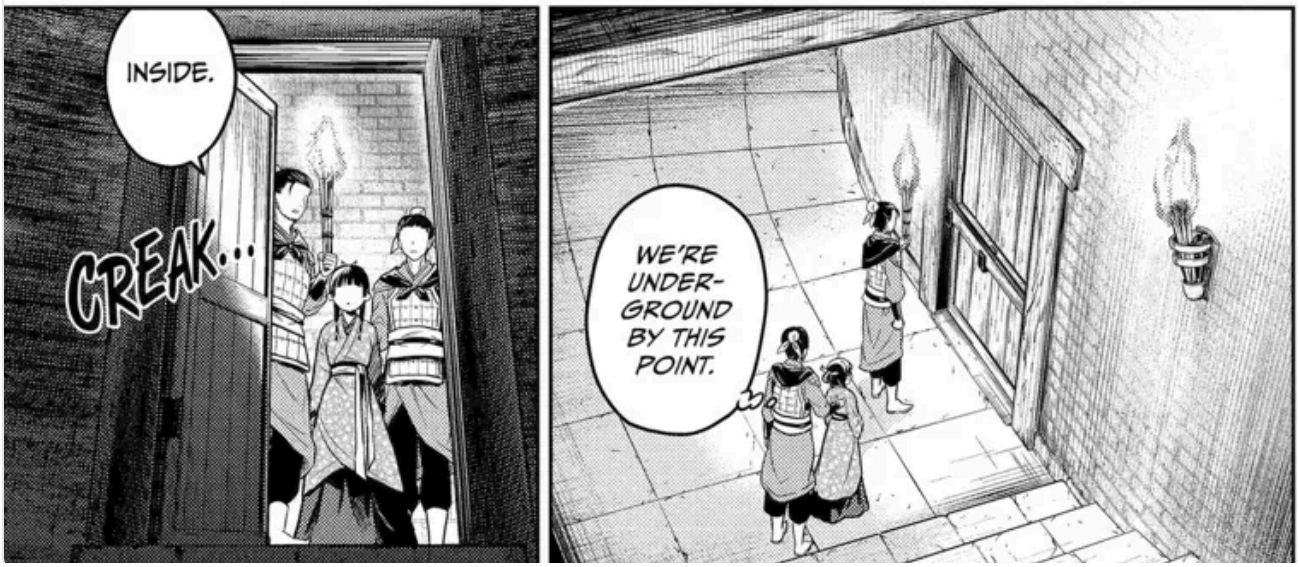
SWSH
A RE-PLACEMENT AT THE READY?
THAT MUST BE A COMMON OCCUR-RENCE.
THIS MUST BE...
...SUIREI'S WAY OF TAKING RESPONSI-BILITY FOR ME BEING BROUGHT HERE.
SHE HAS A CODE SHE KEEPS TO.

HOWEVER...
...IT CLEARLY ISN'T ANY HELP IN DEALING WITH HER.
MOTHER.
I WOULD LIKE TO SEE HER SENT SOMEWHERE ELSE, GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY.
IT HAS BEEN SOME TIME, AFTER ALL.

AH.
SNEER
OF COURSE. IT WORKED SO VERY WELL LAST TIME, DIDN'T IT?
YOU MUST MEAN THE PIT.
JOLT
THE PIT?
THAT SOUNDS FAMILIAR, BUT I CAN'T QUITE RECALL.

SHUDDER
SHVR
SHVK
CLACK
CLACK
CLACK
AH
TO THE PIT WITH HER. TODAY.
IT'S A BIT CRAMPED, BUT THAT WON'T BE A PROBLEM FOR JUST ONE PERSON.

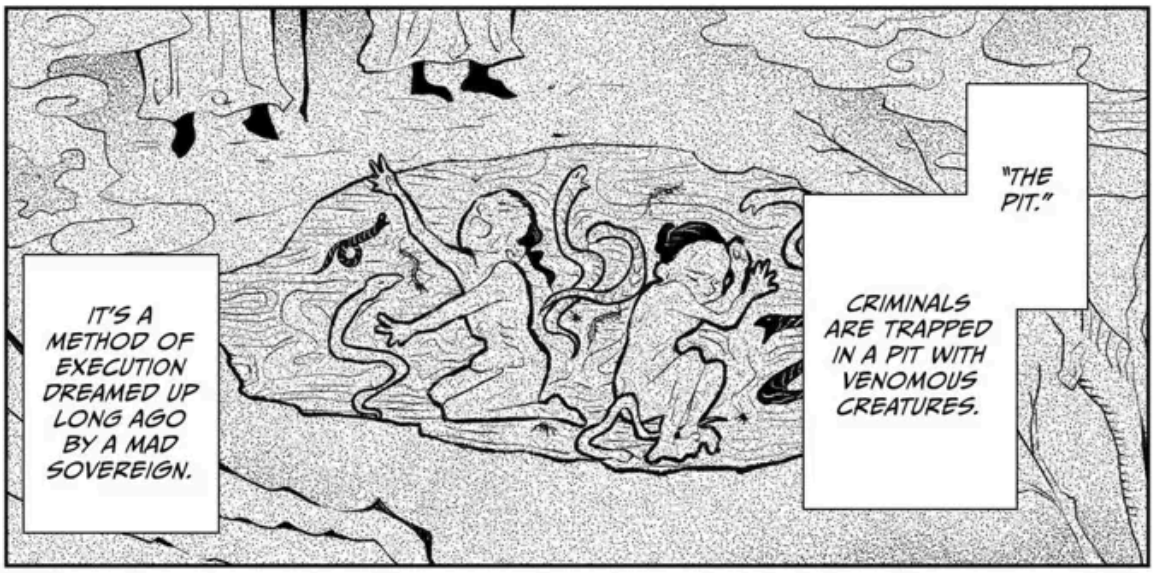
CLACK
CLACK
CLACK
CLACK

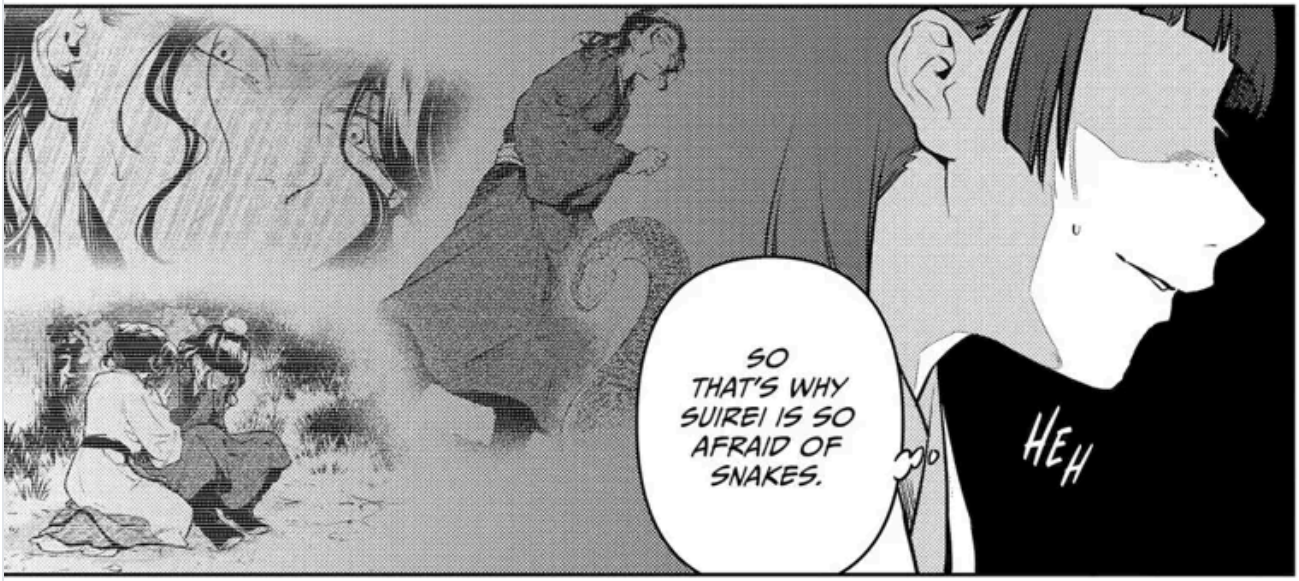

INSIDE.
CREAK...
WE'RE UNDER-GROUND BY THIS POINT.

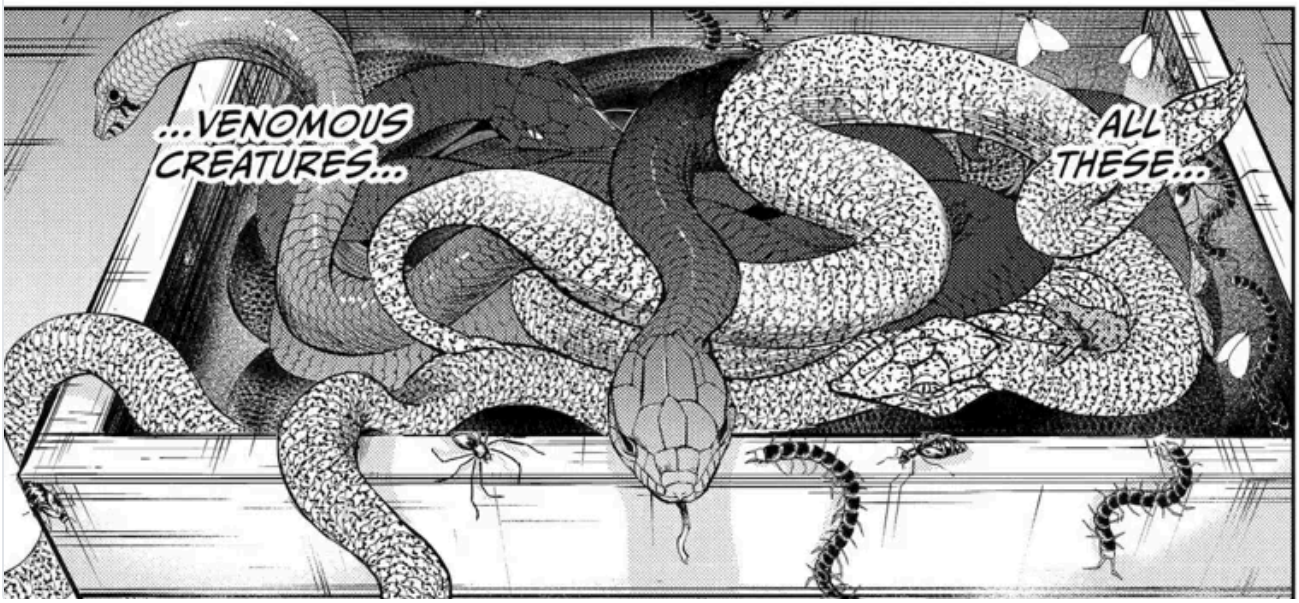
A CIRCULAR ROOM AROUND THREE AND A HALF METERS WIDE. THE CEILING IS INCREDIBLY HIGH.
IT ALSO HAS THE ONLY WINDOW.
HM?
STEPS FURTHER DOWN?

HE'S APOLO-GIZING?
BUT LADY SHENMEI ORDERED IT SO.
I'M SORRY.

WHAT COULD BE INSIDE?
JOLT
KSSK
KSSK
GRRK
GRRK
SLITHER
SSSSSK...
GULP
AH.
NOW I REMEMBER.


"THE PIT."
CRIMINALS ARE TRAPPED IN A PIT WITH VENOMOUS CREATURES.
IT'S A METHOD OF EXECUTION DREAMED UP LONG AGO BY A MAD SOVEREIGN.


SO THAT'S WHY SUIREI IS SO AFRAID OF SNAKES.
HEH


...VENOMOUS CREATURES...
ALL THESE...

YOU PRECIOUS LITTLE THINGS!

PERFECT!
I CAN'T LET A SINGLE ONE GET AWAY!